

Putrajaya's propaganda chief comes to Najib's defence against Dr M
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A few Umno leaders, including the chief of the Special Affairs Department (Jasa), Putrajaya's propaganda unit, are defending Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak from attacks over 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) by calling for proof from his critics.

The Star Online quoted Datuk Dr Puad Zakarshi, Jasa's new head who took over earlier this year, saying that former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad should show evidence to support his allegations against 1MDB and its monumental debts. Dr Mahathir has emerged as Najib's fiercest critic of late, even asking for the latter's resignation.

Puad, who is also an Umno Supreme Council member, said Dr Mahathir had not "substantiated his claims", the news portal said.

"It is hardly surprising that Dr Mahathir did not accept explanations on this issue despite Najib talking at length on the matter," Puad was quoted as saying.

Puad was appointed as director-general of Jasa earlier this year, replacing Datuk Fuad Hassan who died of a heart attack in December last year.

The department is a government agency under the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia and is tasked with fostering national integration and ensuring dissemination of government information.

It has been criticised by opposition politicians in the past for wasting taxpayers' money on propaganda for the ruling Barisan Nasional government.

Puad said it was "only appropriate" that Dr Mahathir prove his allegations.

"I hope he will support his claims with hard evidence and hand it over to the Auditor-General," he told The Star Online.

1MDB is now the subject of an audit by the Auditor-General. The probe was ordered by Najib, who is also Finance Minister and chairman of the 1MDB advisory board.

Another Umno leader questioning the lack of evidence against 1MDB was Sabah Umno liaison deputy chief Datuk Salleh Said Keruak, who told The Star Online that critics, whether from Umno or the opposition, had not shown any evidence of wrongdoing.

"The opposition demands justice and the application of the standard of innocent until proven guilty. But in the case of 1MDB, they practise the reverse and give the excuse that since there is no evidence of innocence, then we must assume there is guilt. We have yet to see 1MDB's balance sheet. If the RM42bil has disappeared, the balance

sheet would certainly reflect it," he was quoted as saying.

Salleh also said people should "not jump the gun" since an independent audit was still being conducted. He also said it was unfair and unjust to accuse Najib before the audit's findings and figures are revealed.

"Why should Najib be denied this same decency just because he is the prime minister?" Salleh said.

Former Umno minister Tan Sri Dr Rais Yatim also said the "war of words" between Najib and Dr Mahathir should stop as it was detrimental to the country.

Yesterday, former information minister Tan Sri Zainuddin Maidin wrote in his blog that Najib was being put in a tighter position with Dr Mahathir's criticism over 1MDB, alleged links with businessman Low Taek Jho and also the murder of Mongolian woman Altantuya Shaariibuu. – April 16, 2015.

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